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ABSTRACT

This document contains summaries of 12 presentations given at a conference held in reponse to the comprehensive Oregon school improvement plan entitled "Oregon Action Plan for Excellence." The plan provides a framework for improving public schools in the areas of graduation requirements, academic expectations and assessment, teacher and administrator effectiveness, school standardization, technology, and state and local policy. The conference, however, focused on the plan's recommendation for a statewide common and comprehensive curriculum for elementary and secondary students. Presentations fell into five main categories: challenges for (1) school reform, (2) policy and technology, (3) planning and practice, (4) state and local leadership, and (5) conference participants. Contents include: "The Oregon Action Plan for Excellence: Implications for Policy and Governance" (Don Egge); "Principles of Curriculum and Assessment Alignment" (Richard Schutz); "Educational Governance: Reactions to Issues Raised by Don Egge and Dick Schutz" (Robert Mattson); "Research Implications for Improving Staff Development" (Ann Murphy); "Realistic Assessment for Usable Information" (Gary Estes); "Anticipating the Consequences of New Evaluation Standards" (Kenneth Duckworth); "The Union of Equity and Quality: A Missing Ingredient" (Leland Stuart); "Curriculum and Assessment: Implementing the Aligned System" (Glen Fielding); "Keeping Perspectives on Education and Reform (Richard Carlson); "Innovation through Partnership" (Ardis Christensen); and "The Limits of Reform" (Roberta Hutton). Reactions by eight conference participants are appended. (IW)

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INTRODUCTION

"Challenge '84: State and Local Initiatives for School Reform" was held during the summer of 1984 in response to a comprehensive Oregon school improvement plan initiated by the Oregon Department of Education. The Oregon Action Plan for Excellence, reviewed and shaped by task forces of educators and citizens during 1983, was adopted by the State Board of Education in June 1984. The conference served as a forum for educators and policymakers to clarify the Plan's intent, to think through its long-range implications for education, and to share ideas for ensuring the Plan's successful implementation in the years ahead.

The Oregon Action Plan for Excellence provides a framework for improving public schools in the areas of graduation requirements, academic expectations and assessment, teacher and administrator effectiveness, school standardization, technology, and state and local policy. The conference, however, was particularly concerned with the Plan's recommendation for a statewide common and comprehensive curriculum for elementary and secondary students.

Conference presenters and participants represented various concerned groups of educators from throughout Oregon. Summarized in the following report, their reactions, predictions, hopes, and concerns about the new goals for Oregon education reflect a healthy balance of optimism and caution by people who are working together toward the shared goal of excellence in education.

The conference sponsors hope that the ideas and recommendations

summarized in this conference report will be helpful to administrators, teachers, school board members, and others who have primary responsibility for implementing the Oregon Action Plan for Excellence in their local districts. The report should also be useful to educators across the U.S. who are initiating school improvement efforts in their home states.

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I

THE CHALLENGE OF SCHOOL REFORM: THE OREGON ACTION PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE

Don Egge, Associate Superintendent for Policy and Program Development
Oregon Department of Education

THE OREGON ACTION PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

> "In the first draft of our action plan we had 'everyone a winner' as our slogan. We meant students, teachers, board members, local and state agencies--everyone a winner, everyone having a role and performing that role. That means partnership. It means that if we are going to have a system of education in this state, partnership needs to be encouraged and nourished."

Don Egge expressed optimism about Oregon's readiness to respond to calls for educational improvement. He believes there is a new feeling of hope and a new vision of what is possible. Effective schools research has given educators new direction for improvement. Moreover, new partnerships are being shared, and there is growing respect for teachers. In addition to the Oregon Action Plan, there have already been a variety of responses in Oregon to the calls for reform. The Teachers Standards and Practices Commission has been involved in extensive planning to set goals and objectives for the state system of education, and, at the local level, many districts have initiated their own plans for school improvement.

Oregon's Excellence Plan is meant to be a "framework for action, not only for schools, but for the State Department of Education as well," Egge said. One of the important things to come out of the Plan's formulation is a definition of the role of the Department. In almost every other state, reform efforts have grown out of legislative or gubernatorial activities, but in Oregon plans were initiated by the State Department. Egge said, "The Superintendent has been very consistent to his approach to this effort." He stressed that task forces could recommend anything appropriate to sound education; the only thing that would be unacceptable would be no action at

all. The superintendent also continually reminded task forces that they were in a political environment; if they did not act, the legislature would very likely step in.

Egge said that besides providing a framework for action, the Excellence Plan reflects several major policy changes. The first shifts the responsibility for schooling from the individual to the school. In the past, schools have viewed education as an opportunity rather than an obligation. New court rulings and laws, however, have obligated schools not only to provide the opportunity for schooling but to ensure that students accomplish what schools and society have said ought to be accomplished. A second policy change does away with the idea of state or local control and establishes instead a balance of responsibilities among various agencies. Third, the Action Plan defines excellence as including both equity and quality. The Plan specifies that equity and quality must be demonstrated by improvement and that improvement can be monitored through measures of effe tiveness and productivity.

One of the major policy changes initiated by the Action Plan is that the state should define the common ends of schooling. Egge stressed that the state does not mean the State Department of Education, but "the state as a collective, an organization working together to define what those common ends ought to be." While the state will control the ends of schooling, the local districts will control the means. "That's a dramatic change," Egge said, "and it suggests that over the long term, the state ought to stop defining any of the things that constrain the flexibility of the local school community."

This policy change means that in the years to come the state will take a smaller role in setting such requirements as the number of days in a school year, the number of hours in a school day, and teacher certification

standards. Egge emphasized that "if we believe that it's the local school that's going to make the difference and that it's important to put the decisions in the hands of the people who have to live with those decisions, then it will be very important for the state to begin to move away from the definition of needs."

Shifting responsibility for the methods of education from the state to the local school districts means that schools will need to build their own capacity for improvement and to learn how to tap helpful resources when they do not have that capacity. The need for partnerships between districts, teacher training institutions, consortiums, research and development agencies, technical assistance centers, and other support clusters is, therefore, greater than ever. Egge reminded conference participants that the slogan for the first draft of the Excellence Plan was "every one a winner." He said that if teachers, students, board members, and local and state agencies are all to be winners, then partnerships between them need to flourish.

Egge concluded with some messages for the partners in education. To schools he said, "It's time to build the capacity to improve and to reach out to others who can help. It's also a time to be bold and a time to challenge myths such as 'technology is dehumanizing.'" Egge urged the State Department, ESDs, higher education, and others who want to help to respect local needs. He asked school boards, administrators, teacher associations, and those who want to provide control to be careful about their demands and to motivate risk-taking on the part of local schools. Egge's message to all partners was "if everyone is a winner, so everyone must be a player; we need ownership if this Plan is to work, and there is room for all of us to be involved."

II

CHALLENGES FOR POLICY AND TECHNOLOGY: ALIGNING A COMMON AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM

Richard Schutz, Executive Director
Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development

PRINCIPLES OF CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT ALIGNMENT

> "If you examine what students are taught, you see what students have learned. If you test for something else, then you see something else. What we're seeing on our tests is a lot of something else--not too much of what we re teaching, not too much of what kids are learning."

Richard Schutz disagrees with the notion that we're a nation at risk. "The contention that student achievement is generally low is an artifact," he said. He believes that low scores on standardized assessment tests are due more to the nature of tests than to low student achievement. For the past several years Schutz and others at the Southwest Regional Laboratory have studied the design and outcomes of national and state achievement tests in reading, mathematics, and language arts. Schutz shared some of his findings to underscore the need for designing assessment systems that are closely aligned with instructional objectives.

One of Schutz's findings was that test scores are generally high at the primary school level, but drop dramatically at the intermediate and high school levels. Data from a national reading achievement test, for example, revealed that the average achievement level of third grade students was 60 percent. At the beginning of the next grade level, however, reading achievement scores fell to 37 percent. Schutz wanted to find out why, so he began to examine the tests more closely. He found that "after the third grade, the test items changed so that kids were no longer given a chance to show what they had learned." In addition, print was much smaller, the test material was ambiguous, and test items such as character analysis and writing techniques had been added to the test. Schutz turned next to data on the mathematics section of a California Achievement Test. Again, he found that

"the higher test scores piled up at the earlier grades." Schutz concluded that "clearly, kids aren't getting more stupid; what you have is a tremendous increase in the difficulty of the test as you move from one grade level to the next."

Schutz then compared grade level instructional objectives with test items assessing achievement at each level. He found that in grades one through four achievement tests generally matched instructional objectives. Beyond the fourth grade level, however, test items did not assess grade level learning objectives. Schutz emphasized that "if you examine what students are taught, you will see what students have learned. If you test for something else, then you will see something else." Schutz concluded from studies comparing assessment tests and instructional patterns that "what we're seeing on our tests is a lot of something else--not too much of what we're teaching and not too much of what kids are learning."

Schutz also pointed out that tests are designed to assess skills, but at the high school level we don't teach skills, we teach courses. "If you ask teachers what they're teaching, they don't say 'I teach higher order skills,' they say 'I teach Algebra I,' or 'I teach general science.'" Schutz noted that skills are won at the primary school level, not at the secondary school level, yet our high school achievement tests continue to assess skills.

Why aren't tests designed to evaluate what teachers are teaching? Schutz concluded that "tests are set up to make test-makers happy and to make assessment theory work." He noted that "if test scores pile up at the top, that doesn' make for good psychometric theory. So we dump other things into the test that have the appearance of what kids are taught. Then we have a normal distribution, which we can write off to genetic and environmental differences, and everyone is happy."

According to Schutz, even the best assessment data is worthless unless it can be translated into usable information. He said that school staff and community members probably won't pay much attention to written or spoken information, but they will respond to a computer. Computerized information should contain data on instruction at each grade level as well as on the demographics of the school population and student achievement. Such information allows administrators to glean information quickly for reporting credible accomplishments to the public and for making needed changes in instruction. Schutz emphasized that accomplishments at the elementary level should be reported in terms of skills, while at the high school level they should be reported in terms of courses completed. "The trick" he said, "is to do something about the information you gather." At the elementary school level, administrators can make sure that teachers have adequate resources for rectifying areas that have been identified as weak. At the secondary level, additional course patterns can be added to fill gaps in instruction.

Schutz said that curriculum and assessment alignment sounds deceptively simple: "It makes sense that what you want to do should match up with what you're doing, and that what you're doing should match up with what you've done." But the process is often complicated because some instructional objectives are taught, while others are only talked about, and we fail to distinguish differences. "Educators are very good at talking," Schutz said. "As we talk we start to believe what we say, and that becomes the basis of our operation." He told conference participants that if the Oregon Action Plan is to succeed, all those involved must do more than just talk; all must agree on the educational goals that should be achieved, and all must demonstrate commitment to reaching those goals.

Robert H. Mattson, Associate Dean and Director of Research and Development
Division of Educational Policy and Management
College of Education, University of Oregon

EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE:
REACTIONS TO ISSUES RAISED BY DON EGGE AND DICK SCHUTZ

> "The functional relationships between recognizing public preferences, setting goals, teaching school, and assessing outcomes is a very technical and complex business, and it's one that just can't be given short shrift."

In response to Don Egge's comments about the Oregon Action Plan's implications for policy and governance, Robert Mattson expressed concern about "framing educational issues as governance issues." He said that "the question we need to ask is to what extent do federal, state, and local governance structures match the preferences of the populations within the boundaries of those structures?" While schooling issues are a national concern, the varying opinions of the nation's heterogeneous population cannot adequately be articulated at the national level, Mattson said. Likewise, state and local governance structures do not always match the preferences of the various populations within those structures. For example, it's unlikely that education initiatives set at the state level can take into account the diverse needs and concerns of school communities in both eastern and western Oregon. Mattson suggested that the public's preference for schooling might be more closely aligned to cultural, ethnic, and economic differences than with local, state, or federal governance structures.

A second problem in educational governance is related to the notion that responsibility for education is shared by federal, state, and local governments. While he agreed that responsibility should be shared, Mattson warned that "there is a real hazard in separating and balancing those responsibilities." Because all levels of government have a stake in the

entire educational system, no single level should have the sole responsibility for any educational process, goal, or outcome. Issues related to teacher certification, for example, are concerns for both the local and state levels of government. "To divide responsibilities for processes and outcomes of certification between state and local governments, as the Oregon Action Plan implies, is risky because such divisions are arbitrary and artificial," said Mattson.

Referring to Schutz's comments about aligning curriculum and assessment, Mattson noted "how difficult it is and how long it takes to really pull off the kind of alignment Schutz is talking about." He said, "The functional relationships between recognizing public preferences, setting goals, teaching school, and assessing outcomes is a very technical and complex business; it's one that just can't be given short shrift." A problem related to alignment is deciding where to start the process. Mattson explained that "if you start with tests you get a different set of answers than if you start with the curriculum." Also in relation to testing, Mattson again expressed concern about aligning educational goals with the preferences of the public. He noted that while he could be critical of standardized tests and their evolution, the tests probably do reflect the educational goals and expectations of the general public. That connection between tests and goals, however, hasn't yet been well developed.

Mattson stressed the need for continued research and development on the relationships between goals, instruction, and outcomes. He said that while technology at the elementary school level has been highly developed, those kinds of relationships have not yet been adequately analyzed at the secondary school level. "While there seems to be some vague connection between secondary school instruction and the development of such things as adaptability, intelligence, and a high level of literacy, we just haven't

unraveled those connections very well yet."

In conclusion, Mattson commended both Egge and Schutz for their contributions to educational excellence. He praised Dick Schutz for "demonstrating credible commitment and credible accomplisnment in analyzing the business of schooling." Mattson also said that Don Egge, Verne Duncan, others at the State Department of Education, and the task forces on the Oregon Action Plan "deserve lots of cheers for taking on the task of initiating the state plan and for giving the thoroughness of consideration and deliberation that went into its development."

III

CHALLENGES FOR PLANNING AND PRACTICE: RECONCILING THE CURRICULUM WITH INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Meredith Gall, Professor, Division of Teacher Education
University of Oregon, College of Education

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVING STAFF DEVELOPMENT

> "The emphasis of staff development needs to change from process to outcomes. Rather than asking 'What can I do in my classroom tomorrow?' teachers need to ask 'Is there a link between my inservice training and my students' achievement?'"

Meredith Gall stressed that school improvement and curriculum alignment must be closely linked with staff development. He told his audience to think about that link as he shared with them some data he and Glen Fielding had collected a few years ago on staff inservice activities. Based on this study, Gall reached some interesting conclusions on the length and content of staff development sessions as well as on a needed change in teachers' attitudes toward achievement tests.

Gall and Fielding interviewed 38 elementary school teachers, their building principals, and assistant superintendents in three Oregon school districts on the inservice sessions they had participated in over a one-year period. One district was near the University of Oregon, the second was isolated on the Oregon coast, and the third was a suburban district near Portland. The teachers' responses in all three districts were very consistent.

Teachers were first asked about the amount of time they spent on inservice activities. Gall and Fielding found that the average teacher engaged in about seven inservice activities per year totaling 73 hours, or almost two whole work weeks--much more than expected. They also found that most inservice activities lasted an average of three hours, although a few teachers participated in longer sessions and others took university courses. They discovered, too, that three-fourths of all inservice were "the classic one-shot staff development activity."

The content of these inservice activities varied. Sessions covered everything from basic skills to professional and personal matters such as teacher stress, retirement, and district school policies. Although teachers were dabbling in all areas, Gall noted that "they're very much concerned with processes they could take back to the classroom and implement right away."

Gall and Fielding found that only 10 percent of inservices were based on participants' needs and that only 6 percent of the teachers assessed their students to see if there was a link between and what they had learned in inservice sessions and student outcomes. Moreover, despite volumes of available research, just 3 percent of inservice sessions trained teachers in direct instruction techniques, aligning curriculum with testing, and monitoring student progress.

Teachers' answers to questions about standardized testing led Gall and Fielding to conclude that a majority of teachers are "turned off by the idea of achievement tests because they feel that tests don't assess what is taught." Seventy-one percent of those interviewed did not want to learn how to bring their basic skills instruction more in line with the content of standardized tests. About 30 percent of those who were negative toward standardized tests were concerned about the use of such tests for teacher accountability.

From their study Gall and Fielding concluded that intensive staff development is needed to change teachers' attitudes about the use of tests. Further, Gall recommended that "what we clearly need are longer inservice sessions on fewer topics because real change happens over a period of two to five years." Most important, the emphasis on staff development needs to change from process to outcomes. Rather than asking "What can I do in my classroom tomorrow?" teachers need to ask "Is there a link between my inservice training and my students' achievement?"

Ann Murphy, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Portland, Oregon

USING INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGIES IN THE ALIGNED CURRICULUM

"Instructional technology is by no means a magic solution, but rather a useful tool to enhance classroom instruction and take it in the direction Oregon educators want it to go."

Ann Murphy focused her presentation on point 6 of the Oregon Action Plan--increasing the use of educational and communications technology. She told participants that educators in Oregon "face a tremendous challenge in striving for excellence in our schools," but she believes Oregon already has the technologies needed to meet that challenge. "What we may have to do is be creative and look at some new ways of pulling these technological resources together to accomplish what we decide is important," she said. Murphy added that Oregon's schools are already demonstrating the practices that lead to high student achievement.

Murphy outlined the resources most needed to "reconcile an emerging common curriculum with the instructional needs of individual students and the educational priorities of the local communities as well as the states." One obvious resource is the huge body of available research on student needs, community priorities, instructional practices, and ways to create effective climates for learning. Other crucial resources are time, people, instructional materials, and money. Murphy believes that the wise use of available fiscal resources is crucial. "We will soon learn," she said, "whether we have a multitude of fiscal resources or whether they're going to be limited. Regardless of what that situation is, what is important is how we decide to use what is available."

Murphy sees the use of educational and communications technology such as television, audiotapes, and computers as "the tools that can support teachers, administrators, and students in the implementation of identified

curricular change." She pointed out that instructional technology integrated with an aligned curriculum can increase the amount of time teachers have for more interactive types of teaching, for focusing on concept development, and for fostering student achievement. Time and teachers' willingness to be creative, as well as staff development to familiarize teachers with various instructional technologies, are all keys to implementing technology-enhanced courses effectively.

Using technology to enhance courses involves supplementing existing materials, instructional techniques, and assessment procedures with a variety of new technologies. Murphy stressed that such technologies would replace neither primary teaching materials nor the teacher, but rather were intended to be instructional supports. However, they must be appropriate to the target population and compatible with existing settings and materials.

According to Murphy, instructional technologies can maximize delivery of instruction, foster precision in that delivery, stimulate student motivation, help monitor student progress, and increase flexibility in teaching. She stressed that instructional technologies can bring a whole variety of educational experiences into the classroom: "If matched with an aligned curriculum, if keyed to those instructional objectives that have been identified as important, there is a true supporting and expanding of primary educational experiences, not a diffusing and wasting of time."

Murphy reminded her audience that combining the best instructional technologies with existing text materials creates a sound educational program that supports existing achievement of the educational goals identified in the Oregon Action Plan. She said, "Instructional technology is by no means a magic solution, but rather a useful tool to enhance classroom instruction and take it in the direction Oregon educators want it to go." The success of our improvements, however, hinges on our commitment to the improvement process.

Gary Estes, Program Director
Evaluation, Research, and Assessment Division
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

REALISTIC ASSESSMENT FOR USABLE INFORMATION

"Arguing against planning is like arguing against apple pie, but at some point it's crucial to actually start using the tests or all available resources will be spent in the developmental stages."

According to Gary Estes, the problems educators face that are related to the quality and equity of assessment are minor compared to the problems that arise from the lack of assessment. Estes noted that in the task force report on assessment, task force members indicated concern that they had not yet had time to consider important issues such as the use of test results, test equity, and curriculum and assessment alignment. While he agreed that those issues are important, Estes stressed that educators need to be careful not to get stuck in the analytical stage: "We in education typically do a lot of planning and discussion. Then, instead of acting on our plans, we go through that process again." He noted that "arguing against planning is like arguing against apple pie, but at some point it's crucial to actually start using the tests or all available resources will be spent on the developmental stages." Estes said that rather than getting caught up in how they're going to measure, educators need to decide what they're going to measure. "You have to be sure that the target you're shooting at is the one you want to hit," he said, "but if you don't shoot at a target, you're probably not going to hit anything."

Estes emphasized the point made by Dick Schutz that schools need to design evaluations that elicit information that can be brought to bear on instructional decisions. For example, if information about attendance is fed into achievement scores, it's then possible to calculate achievement in relation to students' time in school. If data indicate that low achievement

correlates highly with absence, then school personnel may consider setting more effective attendance policies or setting goals to more effectively engage students in school.

Schools also need information in order to demonstrate their credibility to the public, Estes said. Therefore, the needs of the various interest groups should be considered in determining the kinds of information schools should collect. Parents, for example, need information on what students have and have not learned in school in order to set instructional priorities for their children at home; school officials need achievement results on all subjects to make decisions about allocating resources and designing staff development programs; and legislators need information about strengths and weaknesses in schools across the state to justify funding allocations. Estes told conference participants that the risk in providing information is that it may lead to what school officials believe are unfavorable decisions. Nonetheless, he said, information is crucial for demonstrating schools' accountability.

In summary, Estes made the following recommendations about assessment: 1) "target" what you believe is important to teach; 2) make sure that decisions about the content of instruction can be defended to those with a stake in education, such as school board members, parents, and legislators; 3) choose and use tests that are readily available and easily implemented rather than getting stuck in analyzing issues such as equity and alignment; 4) translate measurements into information that's useful both to schools and to the public; 5) realize that change is going to create some pressure and displacement; and 6) "move ahead, accepting some degree of input, but do not let that input paralyze you."

IV

CHALLENGES FOR STATE AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP: SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL REFORM INITIATIVES

Kenneth Duckworth, Senior Research Associate
Center for Educational Policy and Management
University of Oregon

ANTICIPATING THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEW EVALUATION STANDARDS

> "For those students who are not now sufficiently challenged, increasing performance standards may result in increased motivation and general morale. At the opposite extreme, if standards are too high, students and teachers may become frustrated, and that frustration can lead to resistance to schooling."

Kenneth Duckworth urged conference participants to think through the kinds of problems teachers and students will face as a result of new evaluation standards set in the Oregon Action Plan. He noted that there can be two extreme consequences of raising evaluation standards: "For those students who are not now sufficiently challenged, increasing performance standards may result in increased motivation and general morale. At the opposite extreme, if standards are too high, students and teachers may become frustrated, and that frustration can lead to resistance to schooling."

According to the theory of evaluation developed by Sanford Dornbusch and W. Richard Scott at Stanford, both teachers' and students' resistance to schooling may arise from incompatibilities in evaluation systems. Duckworth explained that the first such incompatibility is related to how much control teachers and students have over the objectives to be evaluated. Resistance is likely to occur if evaluation does not focus on outcomes that people working in the system can alter. He noted that one of the objectives in the Action Plan--improving community satisfaction with schools--may well be the kind of objective over which teachers feel they have little control.

The second kind of incompatibility is related to unpredictable evaluation standards. Teachers are likely to feel helpless and resentful if evaluation standards fluctuate, Duckworth said. For example, eight years ago

"new minimum competencies" for high school graduates in Oregon were set. Educators invested substantial time and energy implementing programs for students to meet those requirements. Yet, as a result of the Oregon Action Plan, graduation requirements are changing again.

Duckworth went on to say that setting consistent, predictable evaluation standards across districts, schools, and departments requires agreement and coordination among administrators, department heads, and teachers. From preliminary findings in a study he is conducting on the design and use of tests in high schools, he cited evidence that learning objectives and grading criteria are left largely to individual teachers. Duckworth stressed that successful implementation of the core and common curriculum called for in the Action Plan will require direct and powerful action by administrators to set objectives and evaluation standards for schools that are consistent, predictable, and coordinated.

A third kind of incompatiblity in Dornbusch and Scott's evaluation theory arises when unobtainable standards are set. Duckworth pointed out that some students may not be capable of meeting the increased graduation requirements called for in the Plan. He also said that teachers are concerned about teaching subject matter that may be too difficult for low-achieving students to absorb.

Furthermore, Duckworth said, the Plan calls for increased requirements in the very classes with which students express the most dissatisfaction. He referred to preliminary data from his study on attendance in Oregon high schools. In that study the predominant reason students gave for cutting classes was boredom, and the classes students said they cut most often were core courses of English, math, and social sciences.

In the same study, Duckworth said, administrators and counselors agreed that one of the most common patterns leading to student dropout begins

with students falling behind in courses. Students feel that attendance is futile because they can't catch up, so they eventually drop the course. Duckworth speculated that the Oregon Action Plan's emphasis on increased requirements and more difficult courses may lead to higher dropout rates.

Finally, incompatibilities in evaluation systems may take the form of contradictory results of performance. Duckworth explained that this kind of incompatibility occurs when high performance in one area of study lowers performance in another area. Many teachers feel, for example, that as a result of Oregon's plan to emphasize the mastery of complex scientific knowedge and skills, student achievement in basic skills may suffer.

In conclusion, Duckworth told conference participants to look for "symptoms of disaffection" that are likely to appear as a result of incompatibilities in evaluation systems. One such symptom is apathy: teachers and students lower their expectations and commitments. Another symptom is rebellion: educators sabotage implementation of evaluation standards or conspire to remove them. The third option is exit: teachers look for work elsewhere, and students skip class, show up late, or drop out. Duckworth stressed that anticipating and forestalling incompatibilities that may arise as a result of Oregon's new evaluation standards is crucial to the success of the Action Plan.

Leland Stuart, Research Associate
Center for Educational Policy and Management
College of Education, University of Oregon

THE UNION OF EQUITY AND QUALITY: A MISSING INGREDIENT

> "If, as the Oregon Action Plan indicates, diversity is one component necessary to the achievement of equity, then local boards and teacher organizations must struggle with the seeming contradiction between collective agreement and diversity within and among schools."

Leland Stuart expresse concern about issues related to the Action Plan's "poorly defined objectives regarding equity and quality." He explained that "there is simply no match between objectives related to the pursuit of equity and other objectives related to the pursuit of quality." According to Stuart, the union of equity and quality is central to the definition of educational excellence; without such a union, excellence cannot be achieved.

As an example of the Plan's mismatch between equity and quality, Stuart noted the disparity between the Plan's recommendations about instructional diversity and those concerning academic requirements. The Plan, he explained, states that excellence can be achieved through greater teacher autonomy related to instructional approaches. The general notion of teacher autonomy, however, is in conflict with a number of more specific objectives related to the achievement of excellence. "On one hand, teachers are encouraged to become more flexible in their instructional approaches, but on the other hand their freedom is constricted by requirements that specify the subjects they will teach and requirements that set strictly defined standards for student performance."

Stuart is skeptical that the impasse between teacher autonomy and the Plan's inherent restrictions on such autonomy can be remedied through staff development. He said, "There are simply not enough fiscal resources to train

teachers in the diverse approaches necessary to achieve equity as well as excellence."

Stuart pointed out that salary schedules, set through collective bargaining, clearly perpetuate the belief that the way teachers become more valuable is (1) to spend more years teaching and (2) to get more education--almost always of their own choice. "After costs for salary increments based on these beliefs, the remaining staff development money is a drop in the bucket," he sai' Stuart added that if we are to implement notions of equity through diversification of instructional practice, we must challenge many of the myths about staff development: "We must ask if experience really is the best teacher and if decisions about more education should be left to individual teachers."

Recently completed research on collective bargaining by Stuart, Goldschmidt, and others at the University of Oregon Center for Educational Policy and Management shows that about a quarter of district collective bargaining contracts already specify the contents and time allocation for staff development. Stuart pointed out that "when teacher organizations and school boards bargain, they bargain for the entire district, for the collective." Because inservice decisions are increasingly centralized, individual schools don't have much flexibility in setting up building-specific staff development programs. Stuart concluded that "if, as the Oregon Action Plan indicates, diversity is one component necessary to the achievement of equity, then local boards and teacher organizations must struggle with the seeming contradiction between collective agreement and diversity within and among schools."

Glen Fielding, Program Coordinator, Valley Education Consortium,
Associate Research Professor, Teaching Research Division,
Oregon State System of Higher Education

IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM-BASED ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS IN SCHOOLS

> "The Valley Education Consortium s most challenging task is to assist member districts in making full use of the curriculum-referenced assessment tools they've developed. It's one thing to produce tests and test information. It's another to use information to guide decisions and improvements."

Glen Fielding offered the experience of the Valley Education Consortium (VEC) in implementing the kind of alignment of curriculum and assessment called for in the Oregon Action Plan. He explained some implementation practices VEC has found useful for making systems workable and meaningful and elaborated on issues he felt needed to be faced for a system such as VEC's to work.

Fielding began by briefly describing the instructional programs VEC has developed in the basic skills, which provide districts with a goal-based curriculum, corresponding test item pools and tests, guidelines for using the curriculum-based assessment resources, and annual program evaluation reports. He also noted that these programs were developed by teachers and administrators from the ten school districts and three education service districts in the Consortium, with support and assistance from the Teaching Research Division and Western Oregon State College.

Fielding pointed out that VEC spent a couple of years developing curricula before creating corresponding tests. He suggested that to initiate an improvement effort by developing and administering tests, as is sometimes suggested, was perhaps to put the cart before the horse. Judging from VEC's experience, teachers don't want to focus instruction on a test, but on a curriculum. If the curriculum is good, and tests are matched to it, most

teachers will see at least some instructional utility in testing. "If, on the other hand, tests are given before there is clear agreement as to what students are expected to learn," Fielding suggested, "tests may just add to the confusion."

Fielding focused on a number of practices VEC has found effective in implementing its programs: (1) establishing structures that assure superintendents a large role in guiding implementation; (2) organizing school-based support teams of principals and lead teachers; and (3) pooling personnel and resources from a variety of districts and agencies.

Fielding emphasized that the active involvement of superintendents was indispensable in the implementation effort. All superintendents of VEC schools meet regularly during the year and periodically in special committees to discuss issues related to implementation, such as how best to increase the involvement of principals in VEC programs, or how to connect VEC's work with other instructional improvement efforts under way, such as the instructional Theory Into Practice Program developed by Madeline Hunter. Fielding noted that "superintendents in the Consortium establish the overall framework within which improvements in individual schools take place."

Organizing and supporting teams of principals and lead teachers also has been an important feature of implementation. Lead teachers generally are selected by principals based on their exerience in developing VEC programs and their skills in working with peers on improvement projects. They work closely with principals in assuring that teachers have the materials they need to implement programs, are clear about the expectations for program use, and receive assistance in using the programs in their classrooms. Lead teachers and principals relay any problems that teachers encounter with programs to the Consortium as a whole. Principals and lead teachers also work with district staff in reviewing evidence on program effectiveness and

identifying ways to improve programs.

A third practice VEC has followed, both in the development and implementation phases, is to use talent and resources from a variety of school districts and educational agencies. The education service districts that belong to the Consortium, for example, provide assistance in distributing materials and organizing technical assistance teams to provide help to districts new to the Consortium. Teaching Research, Fielding's agency, provides expertise in research and development. Faculty from Western Oregon College lend assistance in specialized curriculum areas, such as math problem solving and advanced reading comprehension. Fielding noted that the many teachers and administrators released from their regular duties to participate in VEC's work bring varied backgrounds and talents to the improvement process. The value of exchanging ideas, materials, and talents among many agencies is especially apparent in VEC districts because each is small; no single district has the resources needed to achieve the level of improvement in schools to which VEC is committed.

After identifying effective implementation practices, Fielding described several challenges that remained in operating VEC programs. One is to set meaningful performance standards for students and to work effectively with students who don't meet them. Currently, "mastery standards" are established on end-of-year tests, but more experience is needed to determine the appropriateness of these standards and to figure out how best to accommodate the fairly large number of students who do not meet standards. "It's easy to talk about the value of raising standards," Fielding stated, "but devising fair and effective ways of working with students who don't meet them is tough."

Another challenge is to find ways that information on student learning can be used responsibly in evaluating teachers. Fielding felt that

at some point in the near future "instructional supervision probably would be concerned not only with the kind of processes teachers use, but with evidence that students are actually learning what they are expected to learn." Nobody really knows at this point, Fielding observed, how curriculum-based tests can best be used in assessing teacher effectiveness.

Finally, Fielding pointed out that VEC has much work to do in developing inservice programs for both teachers and administrators that prepare them to integrate teaching, testing, and program management more fully and creatively. He said that VEC has tended to rely on informal staff development mechanisms to enhance teachers' and administrators' skills in using the goal-based, mastery-learning model reflected in VEC programs. But informal approaches probably need to be strengthened with more structured and intensive inservice programs if the potential of the model is to be realized.

V

CHALLENGES FOR CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION

Richard O. Carlson, Deputy Director for Research and Development
Center for Educational Policy and Management
College of Education, University of Oregon

KEEPING PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION AND REFORM

> "In the past the federal government was there taking the action, taking the initiative. But where are they today? Who is filling the vacuum they left? It's clear that individual school districts are not doing it. Certainly the universities aren't. It's the State Departments that are taking that action. I think it's remarkable that they are doing it. I applaud them, I support them, and I wish them well."

Richard Carlson emphasized the need to keep some perspective on the notion advanced by recent reports on education that "we're a nation at risk" as we enter the period of reform the Oregon Action Plan calls for. One way to gain that perspective is by comparing the accomplishments of education to the accomplishments in other professions and occupations. Physicians and psychiatrists, for example, frequently misdiagnose their patients; jailers seldom reform their prisoners; and farmers produce just 28 percent of the food they could if they were to use the most modern technology. Comparatively, he said, "schools are doing all right."

Carlson pointed out that "there's folly everywhere, but the folly in education doesn't really hold a candle to folly elsewhere." He referred to Dick Schutz's comments about the folly of curriculum misalignment and to Meredith Gall's comments about folly in the random and idiosyncratic nature of staff development. That kind of folly, he said, doesn't hold serious consequences when compared to the kind of life and death folly committed by the military.

Furthermore, the changes in education called for by the Oregon Action Plan are not the first round of reforms, nor will they be the last. "Attention to schools comes and goes," he said, "but what stands out in

Oregon's present reform movement is the role taken by the State Department of Education." Traditionally, the federal government has been the prime mover in educational reform, while the role of state departments has been regulatory. But now, he said, the government is no longer taking the initiative for improving education. Oregon's State Department is filling the vacuum created by the lack of leadership from the federal government. Initiating the Oregon Action Plan can be defined as an act of leadership, Carlson said, and we should applaud the State Department of Education for its courage in attempting to initiate some action.

Ardis Christensen, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum
Oregon State Department of Education

INNOVATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

> "The collaboration of effort in our separate worlds must be the focal point in the future if any of us is going to succeed. It's really been reassuring today to hear the word 'collaboration' in just about every panel that's been up here. This is really the message I bring not only from the task forces but also from those of us in the department working to implement the plan."

Ardis Christensen's message to conference participants was that "collaboration of effort in our separate worlds must be the focal point in the future if any of us is going to succeed." She said that members of the State Department of Education working to implement the Action Plan "will make a sincere, painstaking effort to involve, listen, learn, and provide." The involvement of university, research, and state and local education communities, she said, serves as an important reality check on the Action Plan and its implementation. Christensen added that the main thrust for collaboration during the implementation stages will be regional; after work committees of citizens and professionals throughout Oregon draft plans, staff from the Department will ask education networks and regional education leaders to review and respond to the plans. "If we do it right," she said, "Oregon teachers, administrators, and community members will always know what we're doing and be part of it."

Christensen challenged educators to work together to implement creative and innovative programs. She said that "very often in the past, to satisfy individual differences in students' needs, we have changed curriculum rather than changing the variables of time or the techniques and methods with which we teach students." She suggested that educators look at districts and schools in the state for innovative models serving a wide range of students.

One such model allows students to get credit for a course by "challenging" it. Christensen warned, however, that while challenge tests assess knowledge of subject matter, they often neglect the assessment of thinking skills on which to base subsequent learning. She added that if students do pass the challenge tests, teachers may feel that what they teach will no longer be a necessary part of the curriculum and their jobs will be jeopardized. It is Christensen's hope, however, that teachers will rise above such insecurities and will constantly update, broaden, and enrich their courses so that instruction continues to meet the current needs of students.

Another notable innovation in the state is the transitional first grade for students who need an additional year for maturation and socialization. Christensen suggested extending the structure to additional grades as well. Other possibilities might include transitional ninth grades for students who are not yet ready for high school coursework and advanced courses for high school graduates who haven't yet made decisions about future vocational or academic training.

Christensen also suggested that educators look at existing cooperative programs between and within schools and colleges as innovative models for meeting the many unique needs of students. Clatsop Community College, for example, has a program that offers two years of foreign language in a nearby hign school and two years at the college level so that college and high school students can cross over to take a total of four years of foreign language. Worthy cooperative programs within schools include an alternative program for dropout prevention in which "at risk" students are grouped for a problem-solving and personal growth class one period a day. In another school, advanced eighth graders spend half a day in high school courses.

In summary, Christensen challenged educators to be creative in

arranging the components of education. She said that "while the components of education--teachers, learners, techniques, skills, and outcomes--will remain the same, the parts can fit together in different ways and different proportions to produce greater student learning."

THE LIMITS OF REFORM

> "How nice it would be if we were talking about restructuring education rather than changing it or reforming it--and I think of restructuring in terms of 'major overhaul.' Reform and change look at manipulating and adapting, adopting and maneuvering within the same structure; I think we've done that for a long time. School is almost a sacred cow in terms of how it works and functions--every change I've seen was just some of that internal maneuvering."

Roberta Hutton's concern about the Excellence Plan is not that it goes too far, but rather that it doesn't go nearly far enough. She said that when she read the Action Plan she thought "how nice it would be if we were restructuring education rather than just changing or reforming it." Restructuring means "major overhaul," she explained, while reform implies simply manipulating and maneuvering the components within the traditional structure. Some members on the task force on which Hutton served were disappointed because their recommendations did not seem to be reflected in the final version of the Plan. Even though they realized that some of their recommendations may have been "just a little too revolutionary" to gain widespread approval by the education community, Hutton said that they would like to have seen a more innovative and drastic action, "one that people would have been darn sure was not just more of the same."

One such revolutionary idea advanced by Hutton's task force would have changed the traditional structure of the school year. The recommendation called for a longer school day and a slightly longer school year with instructional activities scheduled during only four days each week. The fifth day would be devoted to extracurricular activities for students as well as planning and inservice sessions for teachers. Hutton said that such

restructuring would allow time for the kind of ongoing, coordinated staff development programs that can make lasting improvements in instructional effectiveness.

Hutton stressed that "unless educators begin to consider such major restructuring of schools, many of the goals of the Excellence Plan will not be reached because serious constraints are built into the way schools presently operate." The time constraints presently imposed by the structure of the school week, for example, hinder educator's efforts to plan cooperative programs. "If we're going to collaborate, we're going to have to have some time to do it," Hutton reminded the audience. Partnerships between schools and industry will also be difficult within the present structure, especially for small rural districts, because those districts are located hundreds of miles away from the businesses that are willing to cooperate.

Another equity issue small rural schools will be facing is related to the Excellence Plan's push for high student achievement in academic courses. Hutton told conference participants that, unlike most urban districts, only seven percent of the students in her district continue their education. She said that additional coursework in the academics will not benefit the 93 percent of the students who don't go on to college. One of the biggest and most successful programs in her district is a performing arts program, noted Hutton, who expressed concern about what might happen to it when students have to take another year of science, math, and English.

Hutton reminded conference participants of an important point stated in the Action Plan: "Let's not throw the comprehensive high school out the window while we implement all the good things that are in the plan--higher standards, more staff development, more measurement of learner outcomes, and more goal setting." She thinks that the State Department's biggest challenge will be to create an equitable balance of academic and comprehensive

schooling. A similar challenge for school administrators will be to "walk that tightrope in our communities, while we do our best to show that we really are trying to improve schools and aren't just dragging our feet."

REACTIONS BY CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

The following section contains excerpts from reaction papers written by conference participants who earned University of Oregon course credit for attending the conference.

Richard Horyna, Superintendent
Veronia School District 47, Veronia, Oregon

"Our district is renovating an older middle school gym and many people are expecting to see a new gym. When the gym is completed, people will see something that looks pretty much like the old gym, but the wiring, insulation, and supports will all be improved. Maybe this is what will happen with the Oregon Plan. As improvements are made, the schools may look the same on the outside, but the internal functions will be altered to make them more effective."

"We have an active curriculum committee that has grappled with curriculum revision for the past several years. I see the development of a state core curriculum as a blessing, if for no other reason than we are looking for a format to work from as we move to develop curriculum beyond the basic requirements."

Lynn Corwin, Media/Library Director
Klamath County School District, Klamath Falls, Oregon

"All [recent reports on education] have some similar concerns. Those that suggest some actions or recommendations indicate that there will be a crunch between the public's (or educators') heightened expectations for schools and a steady decrease in the supply of dollars. Reform by addition may no longer be an option we have. The challenge of declining resources and unstable funding systems will, in my opinion, be the crucial consequence of the best plans and research."

"The Plan for Excellence provides a framework for changes to this interesting segment of the American dream called education in which we work and struggle. If this proposal is to have any chance at all of causing change in the quality and quantity of our schools, groups such as the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators and the Oregon School Boards Association must be sold on the concepts put forward in the Excellence Plan; colleges must begin to integrate the ideas into coursework; school boards must be convinced of the Plan's merit; and the public will have to be persuaded to finance the expectations."

Cynthia Bost, Student
College of Education

"The Oregon Action Plan is a very impressive document--concise, clearly stated, and holistic. I believe it represents Oregon's healthy response to social and technological change and a commitment to the development and ongoing revision of an educational system that really works for everyone involved."

"So often people who find these changes depressing say, 'We've been through this before, and it didn't solve all our problems. Now here we go off on the bandwagon again!' I believe it is a fallacy to expect any reform to solve all problems once and for all. Somehow educators need to realize that their profession must always be changing if it is to be of any value whatsoever. It must change with the times--it must be allowed to grow. Educational reform needs to be seen from a dynamic perspective rather than from a static one. No changes are going to be accomplished overnight and without broad-based support and involvement, which takes time, nurturing, and much patience."

Anne Leavitt, Information Coordinator
Division of Student Affairs, University of Oregon

"Larger school districts, though perhaps philosophically reluctant about or economically disadvantaged by some of the reform proposals, nevertheless have the staff capability to develop some of the reform strategies, the clientele to support such strategies, and the students to benefit from such strategies. Small school districts, on the other hand, are less prepared to implement such change, have less community consensus or support for such change, and have a student body for whom the reform proposals are a mixed blessing."

"The Oregon Action Plan does not acknowledge that teachers can be their own best critics, nor that their cooperation and leadership are essential to meaningful reform. Instead, the task forces seem to characterize teachers as part of the problem and to charge administrators and community leaders with the responsibility to effect change."

Mohammed Shamsher, British Columbia
Teachers' Federation, Vancouver, B.C., Canada

"To liberate teachers from their preponderant inertia requires a change in administrative styles and a reshaping of the formal power relationships in the school system. More power and autonomy to the teachers should be the guidelines of the supervisor and principal. Teachers should be brought into the decision-making processes of curriculum planning for the obvious reason that any important decisions about the curriculum must, irresistibly, find the teachers in the center of their implementation and development."

"Teaching is widely perceived as a dead-end occupation both within and outside the profession. Discovering what touches the self-esteem of teachers and what could unlock the hidden reservoir of abilities and energy could significantly change this perception from within and make a difference in what teachers do in their classrooms."

Sandra Thixton, Principal
Lakeview Junior High School, Lakeview, Oregon

"It is extremely important that those people who are charged with conducting the evaluations that will play such a major role in the emphasis of improving our schools have the knowledge and experience base to make the evaluation procedure an empowering and enhancing experience for the teacher. It is just as crucial for the school board and superintendents who do the hiring of these evaluators to choose individuals capable of serving as more than 'hatchet-men.' Those decision makers have within their authority the capability to create evaluations in their districts as tools to improve teaching or weapons with which to penalize. For Oregon's schools to become as effective and excellent as we all would wish requires that evaluation that improves teaching be more than just a myth."

William Yuskow, Teacher
Edmonton Public School Board
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

"My immediate reaction at the conclusion of the conference was that the problems faced by Oregon teachers and their school boards are not much different than the ones encountered by teachers and their respective school boards back home in Alberta, Canada."

"Too much 'hodge-podge' is still retained at the expense of the core curriculum. The purpose of schools should be the education of the intellect and the education of the character. Greater emphasis should be placed on the ability to comprehend and to understand ideas. The skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, measuring, estimating, calculating, seeing, and reasoning should be the core of the high school curriculum."

Ronald Bruten, Curriculum Coordinator
Jefferson School District, Madras, Oregon

"If Madras teachers are anything like the others I've known since I began in 1961, they will view the plan with skepticism. There are just too many innovations that have come and gone. My personal list includes I.T.A., open classrooms, inquiry development, values clarification, Man: A Course of Study, and teaching machines. All have had value, but all have quietly died."

"Overall, the Oregon Action Plan for Excellence can be a constructive force. It will motivate us for a few years, and then we will go on to something else. But the Plan will have served a purpose in motivating instructional improvement and in answering public criticism."